Writing Partners Project: The Dance of Writing Instruction

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Abstract

This case study revolves around the teacher: what we do and do not do in our classroom and how our actions impact our students. This area of interest was brought on by several factors. First, it represented a lengthy topic of conversation with my writing partner. My partner is re-taking Freshman Composition after failing the course her first semester and we had a detailed conversation about her first Freshman Composition professor in conjunction with her current professor and the difference in assignments, teaching methods and expectations.

Information for the case study was also pulled from my personal, informal observations of my partner’s current Freshman Composition professor. As an educator-in-training, it was both illuminating and shocking to recognize the problems inherent in certain teaching methods utilized in this particular class. This case study works to trace these methods and the consequences they pose to students in detail.

As much as the case study attempts to unpack and explain the cost to students of specific teaching methods observed, it is also a conscious effort to identify and define what constitutes good teaching. This effort is perhaps secondary to the examination of the methods discussed, but it is still a central aspect to this case study.

As aforementioned, this case study draws heavily on conversation and personal observations. Other sources include: class discussions; Fecho’s *Is This English?*(2004); Hick’s *The Digital Writing Workshop*(2009); Anderson’s *Mechanically Inclined: Building Grammar, Usage, and Style into Writer’s Workshop*(2005); personal essays included in Newkirk and Kent’s *Teaching the Neglected “R”: Rethinking Writing Instruction in Secondary Classrooms*(2007); and Anderson’s *10 Things Every Writer Needs to Know*(2011).

**How do we teach?**

Imagine you are a dancer instructor. You are about to teach your class of 25 girls, each on a different level, a combination step, which is just a long step comprised of smaller steps. All of the individual steps in the larger and more complex combination step should be steps that your dancers are familiar with, though this is not always the case.

Teaching a combination step is not easy. It requires that you first make sure that each dancer can do the individual steps outside of the combination. Next, you must teach them how the individual steps fit within the larger framework of the combination. Often, combination steps call for different bridges and transitions to get from one step to the next which must also be taught; depending on the combination, you may need to hop, switch your weight from one foot to another, shift your center of gravity from the ball of your foot to your heel, or any number of other motions. These bridges and transitions need to be done instantaneously and smoothly, with no obvious interruption to the flow of the step. You must also teach the dancers the rhythm of the step, which is different than any of the individual steps. If the dancers are off by even a fraction of a second, the whole step can be ruined.

But it is more than just teaching the step itself. In a tap step, each individual step has a distinct sound which must be produced clearly. Each step comes with its own individual arm movements; each arm movement requires differing levels of emphasis, height and corresponds with a specific step in the combination. The movement of the step is also important. Some steps can be used to move you across the floor in any direction, some can only move you across the floor in a specific direction and some cannot move you at all. On top of all this, you must also teach your dancers to hear the beat of the music and slow down or speed up the step appropriately. And you only have a limited time in which to teach all of this.

Before you can do any of this however, you need to instill in your dancers a love of dance. You need to inspire them to become dancers and give them the tools necessary, different steps and combinations they can add to their repertoire; when they have learned these, you need to ensure that you have something new to give them. You need to ensure that they have the opportunity to shine. You need to push them, but be there for them every step of the way. If your dancers are not in love with dance and are unmotivated to become better they will never reach their full potential.

The same is true for teachers of writing and their students. Writing instructors face the same struggles as the dance instructor daily. How do we teach students the skills necessary in the limited time we are given with them? How can we teach complex matters without boring them or losing their attention? How do we make our students care?

**What is teacher research?**

Teacher research is intended to help answer questions such as the ones above; it is an essential part of the profession that very few teachers actually engage in. This research involves careful study of the various activities you assign students and their individual and class responses. It requires that you actually do your “homework” and pick activities that may be different but will still produce an observable result. These activities embrace more modern approaches to teaching, including use of the internet and its various resources, instead of relying on tried-and-true and boring methods that have be utilized for decades with little results.

Teacher research also involves constant discussion with students at various points throughout the school year to map their development and thoughts on the topics and activities. It is a life-long process of learning and interrogation of our methods; it is a dedication to our students, their lives and their learning processes. It is the belief that we can always better

ourselves and our teaching and that we have an obligation to our students to do so.

**Researcher’s Background as a Writer**

As a writer, my story is no doubt similar to that of my future students. In high school, I wrote mostly non-fiction essays on pre-determined and assigned topics; these essays were

straightforward, lacked any voice or imagination and were undoubtedly boring as anything. They all followed the same formula: introduce a topic, give a history or analysis of said topic and then restate in one paragraph what had taken me pages to say. I had never earned anything under an “A” on any essay I had written from grade school though sophomore year of high school. In junior and senior year, I had to learn the correct way to write a research paper, but I adjusted quickly and managed to keep my “straight-A” record.

There was virtually no creative writing in my high school years, unless you count a half-hearted attempt to squeeze a creative writing course into a half hour period after lunch. These classes were a complete and utter failure and stopped after only a semester; as a result, I often felt as though I could not write creatively, a mold I never felt any inclination to break.

My first years in college were much the same as my high school experience. I did a lot of essays and analyses, but very little creative writing. It wasn’t until this year that I was forced to actively engage in creative writing on almost a daily basis. Though it was hard at first to change my perspective to produce an effective creative writing piece, I soon found a comfort and freedom in creative writing that was not there in my non-fiction writing. I now know the importance of creative writing in the development of budding writers. I also realized that, much like current students, I was merely “playing the game” when it came to writing. I want my students to learn the joy of creative writing, just like I did. I also wish to teach them that they do not have to “play the game” if they are taught correctly.

**First Meeting**

The night of February 9 found me in a state of mixed emotions; I was meeting with my writing partner for the first time the next morning and I was nervous and excited, uncertain and sure all at once. I was ready to start what I was sure would be a necessary cornerstone to my future, as well as the opportunity to assume the mantle of teacher and work one on one with a student. When the alarm went off at 7:15AM on the morning of February 10, however, all I felt was supreme irritation and exhaustion. As I struggled out of bed and began to get ready, I grew increasingly frustrated as I fought my way through my morning routine; normally, I can get ready very quickly, but on this morning it seemed to take forever. We had been instructed to arrive ten to fifteen minutes early and with that in mind, I went rushing out the door and arrived in the classroom out of breath and with multiple cramps, slightly late, but still early enough. A few minutes after I arrived, Professor Livermore walked in and introduced herself to us. She briefly explained the agenda for the day, a revision of a paper due the following week, and our expected role for the day, helping our partners with their revisions.

This threw me off a bit at first, since we were informed that under no uncertain terms were we to act as glorified editors. I was conflicted as to how I could do this when we had been told not to. However, I decided that since Professor Livermore had done this project before while I had not that I would trust her and do as she asked. After all, it was a one-time thing, right?

While we waited for class to start, I took the opportunity to look around the room. I found it an interesting set-up for an English room; in a way, it reminds me of a science lab: instead of individual desks, there are long, white tables which can seat two to three students at a time. The floor is carpeted, but old as evidenced by its worn nature and bubbles. At the front of the room are a desk and podium for the teacher, as well as an old school blackboard. As I sat facing the board, a wall of windows runs to my right. Students began to arrive and take their assumed seats. Those that sit next to the wall turn in their seats and sit with their backs propped against the wall; a few students come in and make for the seats in which we sit before realizing us. Momentarily disoriented, they are forced to take a different seat, which I can tell puts them out.

Professor Livermore began class by reading out the names of our writing partners, instructing the students to raise their hands as their name is called, so we are able to identify them. I was originally assigned two partners, S and J, but J volunteered to be partnered with a colleague who had no partner. As I took my seat next to S, I felt my nerves return full force; I took a moment to collect my thoughts and to observe my partner. S is a light skinned African American female with huge brown eyes and a wide and open face around which falls collarbone length dark hair. At first glance, she is a casual dresser, arriving in simple jeans and a t-shirt and has almost a bohemian style with a big slouchy boho bag that doubles as a backpack. As she pulls out her draft and various other supplies, I notice her fingers are long and thing, artist’s fingers. She is neat and orderly and knows where everything is.

At this first meeting, I did not learn much about my writing partner; she is quiet and polite. S listened to what I told her and offered answers when pressed, but did not volunteer them freely. She kept her focus on me and her draft, and did not interact with her fellow classmates or even Professor Livermore as she walked around the room. I found that if I asked her to locate a problem in a sentence, she could normally identify what I was looking for with very little help or prompting. It was quickly obvious that she knew what she was doing and I felt from the beginning that she was already a good writer, but looking at her paper I could also see that she has some problems applying her knowledge. In reference to the dance metaphor, S had all the basic steps down; what she needed help with was fitting her previous knowledge of the basic

steps into the larger framework of the combination step.

**Second Meeting**

My second meeting with S was again in the classroom due to scheduling difficulties. Again, we were asked to help the students with revisions, but this time our duties were expanded to include aiding the students with annotations. This part of the assignment was a bit difficult for me; I do not remember having had to use annotations in my high school or college experience, though I am sure that I have. I found that I actually had to ask S to further explain the assignment and the annotations they were using; she proceeded to pull out a sheet of paper and explain the different annotations that they had been discussing. I realized once again that S really knew what she was doing and the basic skills necessary for writing; the only thing she needed help with was the overall polish.

At this second meeting, S opened up a little more and I was able to learn more through my observations. I discovered that S was quite determined to prove herself; when pressed, she will look through articles for the citations she used until she finds them. She refuses to give up or give in, an admirable trait. She always seems to have a good grasp of the assignment and is able to take suggestions well and apply them to her work. She was still quiet and respectful, but she was more willing to talk. This time she did interact with Professor Livermore; S called her name out to get her attention, but was very disengaged with the following conversation, which ended up being rather one-sided. After Professor Livermore walked away, we talked a little bit and S revealed that her first Freshman Composition professor was very tough and authoritative. Students were encouraged to use direct quotes rather than paraphrase, an idea which can only harm them in the future since the bulk of what they will write will need to be paraphrased from legitimate sources (Appendix A). By the end of the meeting, I think S had revealed that she was capable of performing the combination step from the dance metaphor she just needed help with the overall flow of the step.

Despite the positive observations I was able to make about S, I found myself quite annoyed by this assignment. We were supposed to be helping these students become better writers, not acting as their personal editors. It is hard to help a student to become a better writer when we all we have to work with is an essay that has already been written. In Gretchen Bernabei’s essay “The School Essay”, we are told that the purpose of an essay is to track the movement of the mind, a goal that can be divided into a discernible process: decide to what to say, design a structure and flesh it out (Newkirk and Kent 2007). We had seen none of the first steps taken: the thought process, the selection of a topic, the development of that topic into a draft. All we got to see was the final product on a subject we really knew nothing about. We could not examine the essay’s validity, nor could we really help the students with their writing because this was a non-fiction essay and they were just reporting on the articles rather than analyzing them. There was no movement of mind, no design and no deep writing. As such, all we could really do was nitpick over the tiny details we are being taught to ignore. It not only went against everything I have learned, it also went against my better judgment, because I felt that I was not really able to help S with anything in these first meetings.

**Third Meeting**

The third meeting with S took place the week before Spring Break in all the drama and last minute preparations. I had thought very carefully about what I wished to do during this meeting and believed that I had a solid plan. We sat in The Galley and started the meeting with writing survey. As she answered the questions, I made observations in my writing notebook; for instance, I noticed that she writes on an extreme slant with the paper almost parallel to her body. She is a thorough writer, answering all questions fully. Though instructed to simply write down her first thoughts, it is obvious that she takes the time to think through her responses and to re-read what she has written. I looked up when I heard S laughing. When I asked what was funny, she pointed to the first question on the survey, “What is a writer?” She answered that it was just a weird question, obviously something that she had never been asked before.

After she had completed the writing survey, I took a moment to skim her answers; not surprisingly, she identified a good writer as someone who “…can give good information on whatever it is that they are writing and find good resources to back up what they say” (Appendix B). What did surprise me was her response to the question she had found so funny, “What is a good writer?” Displaying uncharacteristic insight and an almost lyrical quality, S answered that a writer, “…is someone who expresses their feelings or thoughts through words” (Appendix B). She also identified her creativity as her writing strength and feels, “…pretty confident in my writing. I know I have the ability to write really good when I apply and put my mind to it” (Appendix B).

These responses gave me hope and a stronger belief that the exercises I had planned would work well for S and her particular abilities. I next announced that we are going to free write, an exercise intended to help ease her into writing. To my surprise, S seemed almost too excited for this activity, though I found myself pleased with this response. While I explained the basic directions of the free-write exercise, S asked multiple times if it is meant to be “what she is thinking”. When I assured her this is the case, she seemed pleased and eager to begin. I set up a timer for three minutes and joined her in free-writing, an act which I think surprises her. Though I was also writing, I took the opportunity to glance up every so often and observe her. She appeared relaxed and almost confident, though she was writing a bit slow and seemed to be thinking about what she was writing.

At the end of the three minutes, I expanded the free-write into a cubing exercise, where I asked her to pull random words from her previous free-writes and do a new free-write using that word. She seemed hesitant and uncertain, but by the end of the third free-write, her confidence had grown and she appeared to be writing faster. She was stopping to think less, though she did occasionally glance up at the various disturbances around her. Just as she finished the last free-write, a friend walked up and tried to talk to her, but she instantly dismissed him.

I asked S how she felt and she replied that she felt good, mainly due to the words that she wrote about; there was apparently some situation in which she had found herself earlier that day and she used the free-writes to blow off steam. I questioned her further and found that she actually keeps a journal, where she writes down her thoughts, because, according to her, “I would rather talk to a journal than a person” (Appendix B)

After the free-write activity, I decided to address what S had identified as her problem area and do a short grammar activity based off of the example provided on page 25 of Anderson’s *Mechanically Inclined* (2005). Because we were pressed for time, I chose to modify the proposed activities slightly. Instead of using prepared examples from literature, I quickly wrote a few sentences off the top of my head with mistakes included. Taking Anderson’s advice, I wrote one sentence at a time and presented them to S in between. The first two sentences I wrote gave her some trouble; on the third sentence, however, she took me completely by surprise. The two mini sentences I provided her with were, “The shoes are purple. And I don’t like purple.” After staring at the sentences for a few moments, S hesitantly asked, “Can I change the whole sentence if I want?” When I said yes, she proceeded, much to my surprise, to re-write the sentences as, “Purple is one of my least favorite colors, which is why I don’t like this [sic] shoes very much” (Appendix C).

This sentence completely astonished me. The ease and speed with which she wrote this sentence told me that she is comfortable and practiced with creating complex sentences. I told her that it is a wonderful sentence and the last thing I expected. I felt obligated to quickly explain that “this” would be “these” because shoes are plural, but I did not push the issue. I returned to praising her for completely taking me by surprise and writing the sentence in a way I hadn’t expected. She looked very pleased with herself and with my praise and informed me she was always a good writer, “…until I got to college” (Appendix B). I asked why she thought this was and she replied that it was because of her first Freshman Composition professor.

This response intrigued and saddened me a little. As I left the meeting, my mind was churning; I realized that S knew the combination step well enough and that she could perfect it if the teaching instruction was changed. As I reflected on my meetings with S, I realized that her first Freshman Composition professor may not have been the only negative influence on S’s writing. I recalled my observations and frustrations regarding her current Freshman Composition professor, Professor Livermore. Though I know that this case study should focus on my writing partner and her problems, I decided to go a different route and consider the teaching practices of S’s Freshman Composition professors.

**So, what’s the problem?**

At the second meeting while discussing annotations, S tells me how her first professor would rather they use direct quotes rather than paraphrase. I question her further, asking her to clarify what she has said. “So, she didn’t want you to paraphrase? She wanted you to just pull direct quotes?” Maybe S can tell that this is angering me, so she quickly back-pedals and explains, “No, we were allowed to paraphrase. But sometimes, it wouldn’t be far enough away from the original. Rather than have us plagiarize, our professor just had us use direct quotes” (Appendix A).

Though this second explanation makes more sense to me, I still cannot help but find fault with the professor’s methods. I am reminded of our class discussion on March 19 (Appendix D), where we discussed the role of grammar in the classroom. During the discussion, the idea emerged that students are able to discern the rules of grammar, but are never taught the correct application of those rules. Though we were talking about grammar at the time, that same idea can be really applied to teaching any aspect of English, particularly with S’s example of citations. When questioned, she could readily tell me the rules of citation, plagiarizing and paraphrasing, but this knowledge did not translate to her essay. Her citations only had minor problems, but her paraphrasing was so close to the original that it bordered on plagiarism.

The blame for this I lay at the feet of her first Freshman Composition professor. Her students obviously knew what plagiarism was, but she did not seem to work with them in developing their paraphrasing abilities so as to avoid individual plagiarism. Instead, she told them to use direct quotes, an easy out that teaches the students nothing. In addition, by not developing their paraphrasing abilities, this professor is really hurting her students’ future writing endeavors. In any scholarly or professional writing, the bulk of the piece should be paraphrasing or analysis, with direct quotes thrown in as support or when paraphrasing is impossible. Anderson (2005) tells us that, “Everything we write today prepares us for the writing task of tomorrow” (p.8). In S’s first Freshman Composition class, they were not properly taught analysis or the ability to synthesize vital information, skills necessary for any career writing; they were taught to utilize direct quotes for the bulk of their paper, something that will hurt them in the future.

Interestingly enough, though I have not asked S about it yet, my observations of Professor Livermore lead me to believe that she may not be focusing on developing paraphrasing and analytical ability, either. She has students annotating, but in my time in her class, she does not address how to take those annotations to further their paper. Perhaps she discussed this in a class I did not attend; however, the fact remains that neither professor appears to be utilizing the practice of scaffolding, a staple of any successful act of teaching. Scaffolding is the act of building upon prior knowledge to help students learn new knowledge or activate hidden knowledge. If we do not practice scaffolding, we are not ensuring that our students are not learning to their full capacity.

Even if Professor Livermore did address the issue of paraphrasing and citation, she is not completely innocent in terms of poor teaching decisions. First, and perhaps most annoying of all, she did not utilize us to our fullest advantage. Rather than taking the opportunity to allow us to work closely with and help develop or better our partners’ writings, she had us editing papers, a menial task. Though we could, of course, meet with our partners outside of class, it is very difficult to navigate different schedules and students are never as willing to participate outside of class as inside. If we had been given class time, we might have been able to make a bigger difference for our partners. Instead, she used us as editors; it could be said she had us doing her job instead of ours.

In addition, she did not give her students much freedom within the assignments. I have already briefly discussed the problems with coming in as help in any capacity at such a late stage in the writing process; if we come in too late, we cannot see or help with the beginning stages and our usefulness is diminished. The very fact that the writing process is so easily discernible and strict is another concern. The process for this class appears to be very similar to the one described by Hicks (2009) in that it, “…involved a topic that my teacher selected for me…This process took a total of two to three weeks, in which time we moved from book to note card, from note card to outline, from outline to handwritten draft and…from handwritten draft to a final draft, produced over a few days of typing on the word processor” (p.16). There are, of course, a few modifications for the new technological age, however, the drudgery that pervades is mind-numbing. As Anderson (2005) says, “Writing should be a joyous act, not drudgery” (p.xiii).

Professor Livermore also does not appear to figure creative writing into her teaching. Students are expected to write two summaries of articles and a persuasive essay, but very little time seems to be devoted to creative writing. As I watched S doing her free-writes, I saw firsthand the intense pleasure that she derived from it, the freedom she felt in being able to write down her thoughts just for the sake of writing down her thoughts. There was no grade involved, no pressure and I didn’t ask her to reveal in any way what she had written unless she chose to do so.

Creative writing is a necessary part of any English classroom, even if it is not for a grade. Creative writing allows students to tap into their emotions and reflect on their thoughts, feelings and beliefs. Anderson (2005) sums up the importance of creative writing when he tells us, “Writing is not about impressing; it is about expressing. Writing is about what’s important to you and your world” (p.15). By allowing students the freedom to participate in creative writing, we are showing that we are interested in them and their lives. It allows us to build a relationship with our students, a relationship desperately needed if we are to teach effectively; it also gives students the opportunity to write and think on a deeper level, a skill which can then be transferred to other writings and activities. As we learned in class, the ability to extrapolate skills from different activities and apply them in new settings is a crucial part of student development.

Despite the noted concerns, Professor Livermore’s teaching decisions are not all bad. She is making a conscious effort to give students choice by allowing them to pick one of three articles to read and summarize. This follows Fecho’s advice in his work *Is This English?* (2004); Fecho advocates giving the students choice to pick their topics, which Professor Livermore is doing to a certain extent. However, she is still limiting her students’ options to predetermined choices. Fecho (2004) also endorses using topics or issues that are relevant in modern society. Professor Livermore keeps her choices within the decade, but she could certainly use more contemporary articles. She could also pick articles that are more interesting and not a complete bore to read. Finally, though, her idea is sound, Professor Livermore needs to understand that, “Just reading the mentor text doesn’t do the trick, though. If you want to research-proven results…interaction and analysis must occur. Active processing of the model includes taking the writing apart and putting it back together, naming its elements, and supposing why authors made the choices they did” (Anderson 2005, p. 25).

**Conclusion**

Let us return to the dance metaphor at the beginning of this case study. Both S’s first and current Freshman Composition professors appear to be having problems teaching their students the combination step. They work with their students to learn the combination step, but they may not spend enough time helping their students learn the individual steps that make up the combination step. Without those individual steps, it is hard for students to learn the combination step.

These professors are making a more fundamental and crucial error, however. Much as the dance instructor must ensure that her students have a basic love of dance before she can teach them more complex and advanced steps, so, too, must the teacher work to develop a love of writing in his or her students before expecting a high standard of writing; at the very least, our students need to be comfortable in their writing if we expect them to write successfully. The Freshman Composition professors do not appear to concern themselves over whether or not their students love writing. As long as their students can produce the desired results, it does not matter whether or not they enjoy writing. In dance terms, they want the combination step, but do not care if there is any joy or emotion behind it. Without the love of dance behind it, the combination step is hollow and has no meaning, much as writing is without any sense of personal enjoyment or gain.

Though I have found fault with their teaching methods, I do not believe that wither professor is a bad teacher; I simply feel as though they should look to modifying their lessons in order to maximize student learning and ability. At the very least, I have been able to observe less effective teaching methods and define for myself what teaching practices I want to use in my future class.

I plan on bringing creative writing, choice and freedom to the forefront of my classroom. I want to bring in modern issues, technology and ideas into my classroom and teach my students how to utilize the tools of their generation. I want my students to be able to take what I teach them in the classroom and apply it to their everyday and future lives.

As Kent tells us in his 2007 collaborative work with Newkirk, *Teaching the Neglected “R”: Rethinking Writing Instruction in Secondary Classrooms*, “Managing a twenty-first centurt language arts classroom that welcomes diverse writers-as well as a variety of readers, speakers, listeners, artists, musicians, athletes, mathematicians and scientists-is tricky. There’s no single formula, template, or textbook to guide us in this work. Our students arrive, each one with an assortment of gifts and challenges as writers, learners **and** as people and that’s where we begin” (p. 267). This is where I plan to begin, using the knowledge learned in ENGL 487 and gleaned from the observations I made during this case study.

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Appendix A

Field Notes

Field Notes 2/24/12

* Objective: revise paper, work on annotations for new paper
* Told to use direct quotes instead of paraphrase to avoid plagiarism-loss of voice?
* Tough original professor-more suited to easy-going nature of new prof.
  + “No, we were allowed to paraphrase. But sometimes, it wouldn’t be far enough away from the original. Rather than have us plagiarize, our professor just had us use direct quotes.”
* Confidence growing; actually active in editing
  + When asked question, able to identify the problem and how to fix it
* Quiet, but using voice more
* Respectful of prof; willing to ask questions but disengaged with response-calls out prof’s name to get attention
* Good grasp of assignment
* Able to take criticism well and apply it
* Determined to prove herself-will look to specific citation for 3-5 mins
* Adds extraneous words in work-“that”, “which”, “like’
* Some structural errors-run-ons, fragments, awkward sentences-typical urban schools? Urban talk?
* Their/there/they’re issues
* Identifies grammar as problem
* Idea also problem? (6 traits of writing)
* Overall stiltedness with writing-uncomfortable? Unsure?

Tentative agenda for Meeting 3 (3/6/12)

* Consent form
* Preliminary writing survey part 1
* Freewrite (5 min)
  + Cubing (several segments, 3 min each)
  + Discussion
    - What did we do?
    - Why did we do it?
      * Skills involved?
      * Overall benefit?
    - How did you feel doing it?
    - Purpose: increase comfort with writing, sentence flow, ideas
* Grammar activity (5 min)
  + Several sentences, pertaining to noted problems
    - Their/they’re/there
    - Run-ons
    - Fragments
  + Discussion
    - What did we do?
    - Why did we do it?
      * Skills involved?
      * Overall benefit?
    - Purpose: address specific issues defined by student, importance of revision, gain confidence in grammar
* Preliminary writing survey part 2

Field Notes 3/6/12

* First impressions
  + Ran slightly late, but texted
  + No questions asked during consent form
  + Survey
    - Apprehensive, but laughing
    - “What is a writer?”-weird question
    - Writes on extreme slant-paper almost parallel to body
    - Thorough writing-answers longer than expected (instructed to write first thoughts)
    - Takes time to think about response
    - Stops to ask how to spell “expand”-second guessing herself?
    - Seems to re-read answers
    - Noise at question 6, but slight smile
  + Freewrites-excited, keeps reassuring that it is “what she is thinking”
    - Cubing-hesitant, uncertain, but no complaints, seems ok at the end
    - 2nd cube-slight noise-disbelief, frustration, self conscious of word irrelevant that she has landed on-uncertain how to spell
    - Writing slightly faster, seems more confident stopping to think less, but does glance up occasionally-distracted
    - Friend walks over-intentionally dismissed
    - How do you feel?
      * Blew off stuff
      * Words played a part, talked about a situation
      * Keeps journal-thoughts-difficulty expressing yourself “rather talk to journal than a person”
    - What did we do?
      * Free-write-anything on mind, writing thoughts down
      * Pick a word, then write a new paragraph
      * 2nd-choose word that relates
    - Why did we do this?
      * “[We did it] to open up our mindset and as a good starting place. It’s a good warm-up to get your mind thinking and it’s a good way to increase comfort. If students could write about their feelings, it would get them more into writing. It can also help to expand vocabulary and thoughts and direction, which can be used to write better research papers. But I wouldn’t want to do it in high school. I wouldn’t mind doing it if I had to, but I don’t really want to.”
  + Grammar
    - Stylistic
    - Seems more hesitant
    - Less sure
    - 2nd sentence-saw way that I didn’t
    - Asked permission to re-write
      * Change the whole sentence if I want?
    - Made it more complex
      * Always a good writer until she got to college
      * Got a B on last paper of first semester, one of a few

Appendix B

Preliminary Writing Survey

1. What is a writer? How would you define a “good writer”?

A writer is someone who expresses their feelings or thoughts through words. A good writer can give good information on whatever it is that they are writing and find good reliable resources to back up what they say.

1. Why is it important to write?

It is important to write because it expands your skills to be able to speak on a professional level, and helps to speak proper.

1. How do you see yourself as a writer?

I see myself as a pretty good writer. Other than grammar and having a few wordy sentences.

1. What are your writing strengths? In which areas do you feel you might need help?

I would say my writing strengths are my creativity that comes into my writing and be [sic] able to express my thoughts getting my point across.

1. Overall, how comfortable are you with writing? Overall, how confident are you with writing?

I’m pretty confident in my writing. I know I have the ability to write really good when I apply and put my mind to it.

1. Who are your favorite authors/poets? Why?

I would say Zane is my favorite writer because her way of thinking and being so comfortable in her own skin to discuss some of the things she does draws me to what [sic] to read more of her books.

(Complete after activities are finished)

1. What are your thoughts on the free-writing activity that we did? Do you think it was helpful? How?

I believe that free writing is a good tool for students to use in order to expand their way of thinking and clearing their minds. Free writing is a helpful warm-up that can be applied to students to get them ready to write more complex.

1. What are your thoughts on the grammar activity that we did? Do you think it was helpful? How?

I think the grammar activity was helpful. It help me realize that I’m capable of writing complex sentences in which I can take something simple and make it more than what it is.

1. Overall, what are your thoughts on today’s meeting? How are you feeling about the Writing Partner’s Project after this meeting? How are you feeling about your writing?

I think today’s meeting was productive and it helped me realize some things about myself that I didn’t really pay attention to before. I enjoyed the project.

Appendix C

Grammar Activity

Their over there.

-Intended sentence: They’re over there.

-Actual sentence: none

\*\*UNABLE TO DO ALONE\*\*

The girl is holding a book which the author’s name is Debbie Reynolds.

-Intended sentence: The girl is holding a book by author Debbie Reynolds.

-Actual sentence: The girl is holding a book, in which the author’s name is Debbie Reynolds.

\*\*ABLE TO PRODUCE SENTENCE ON OWN. DIFFERENT THAN SENTENCE INTENDED, BUT WORKS FINE\*\*\*

The shoe is purple. And I don’t like purple.

-Intended sentence: The shoe is purple, but I don’t like purple.

-Actual sentence: Purple is one of my least favorite colors, which is why I don’t like this [sic] shoes very much.

\*\*SENTENCE PRODUCED ON OWN. DIFFERENT THAN SENTENCE INTENDED, BUT ACTUALLY MUCH BETTER. TOLD HER TO SWITCH THIS TO THESE, BUT NOT A BIG ISSUE\*\*\*

Appendix D

Role of Grammar

* What role does grammar instruction have in the instruction of teaching writing/?
* Worksheets are bad
  + Inundated with mistakes
  + Discern rules, don’t learn application
* Enough basis in grammar by kindergarten to write a story
* Heart of our writing classrooms should be meaning
* Using visual texts and charts
* The Drill and Kill method
* Focus on craft rather than correctness
* GRAMMAR: principles that guide structure of paragraph
* MECHANICS: way we punctuate what we say/write
* Punctuation only crucial to writing (?)
  + Descriptive v. prescriptive Descriptive-language change over time
  + Prescriptive-standing firm against forces that deter traditional forms
* Mistakes distracting? Do they change meaning?
* Classist? Rules set down by hierarchy (arbitrary)
* Respect for cultural differences
* Not about how you’re writing, but about what you’re writing
* Write everything you want to say first, then edit
* Anderson’s *Mechanically Inclined*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| REFLECTIVE THINKING | * self-aware: clearly identifies and illustrates personal strengths and struggles, puzzlement, and areas of inquiry. Specifically describes reasons for their occurrence. Provides insightful information about related and/or future situations. * risk-taking: communicates positive and negative learning experiences with insight and concrete examples; provides illustration of learning processes and expectations; effectively defines and clarifies values, thoughts about self, students, and nature of work. Clearly demonstrates willingness to change and learn, even to point of operating differently than perceived norm. * goal-directedness: goals for instruction are specific and derived from thorough analysis of current performance. Suggestions for self-improvement are clearly linked to review of strengths and struggles of current work. Proposed goals are relevant, ambitious but attainable. | * self-aware: identifies personal strengths and struggles, puzzlement, and areas of inquiry by specifically stating areas in which they occur, though reasons may be less explored. Can identify and evaluate experiences but does not differentiate resolved from unresolved issues or questions. * risk-taking: communicates positive and negative learning experiences openly but in general terms; describes learning processes and expectations, values and thoughts about self, students, and nature of work. Willingness to change and learn can be inferred though implementation is limited. * goal-directedness: goals for instruction are specific and linked to analysis of current performance. Suggestions for self-improvement are generally related to perceived strengths and struggles of current work. Proposed goals may not be relevant, ambitious or realistic. | * self-aware: identifies general personal strengths and struggles, puzzlement, and areas of inquiry though examples may not be specific. Conclusions are vague. Reflection does not take into account new questions or issues. * risk-taking: refers to positive and negative learning experiences, though terms may be broad or unsubstantiated; partially addresses learning processes and expectations, values, thoughts about self, students, and nature of work. Willingness to change and learn cannot be determined from information presented. * goal-directedness: goals for instruction are general and/or unrelated to analysis of current practice. Suggestions for self-improvement and proposed goals are general, tentative, or divorced from stated strengths and struggles. | * self-aware: identifies personal strengths and struggles, puzzlement, and areas of inquiry in vague or unsubstantiated ways. Conclusions are missing. * risk-taking: references to positive and negative learning experiences, thoughts about self, students, and nature of work are absent or ambiguous. Reflection does not include information that suggests willingness by teacher to learn or change in any way. * goal-directedness: relationship between perceived goals and current practice cannot be established, either because analysis is too superficial or has not been completely carried out. Goals are not stated in attainable terms. | Insufficient evidence. |
| **BUILDING A RATIONALE** | * focuses on 1 or 2 striking writing and teaching practices in CS * discusses complex relationships between key terms, practices and theories expressed in these (“It looks as if…”) * makes rich connections between relevant course materials and CS in confronting and discussing implications/consequences of practice * demonstrates thoughtful processes of (re)constructing pedagogy and discusses this | * focuses on 1 or 2 striking writing and teaching practices in CS * discusses relationships between key terms, practices and theories expressed in these (“It looks as if…”) * makes solid connections between relevant course materials and CS in confronting and discussing implications/consequences of practice * discusses processes for (re)constructing pedagogy and demonstrates some evidence of accomplishing this | * works to focus on one or two striking writing and teaching practices in the case study * identifies and/or discusses relationships between key terms, practices and theories expressed in these (“It looks as if…”) * acknowledges course material in considering implications/consequences of this principled practice * identifies processes for reconstructing pedagogy | * works to focus on one or two striking writing and teaching practices in the case study * suggests relationships between key terms, practices and theories expressed in these (“It looks as if…”) * hints at course materials in considering implications/consequences of this principled practice * identifies necessity of (re)constructing pedagogy | Insufficient evidence. |
| **PLANNING AND PREPARATION** | * demonstrates rich content knowledge * demonstrates rich knowledge of partner * selects astute and productive instructional goals * demonstrates rich knowledge of resources * designs coherent instruction * demonstrates thoughtful assessment of learning and goals | * demonstrates solid content knowledge * demonstrates solid knowledge of partner * selects productive instructional goals * demonstrates solid knowledge of resources * designs coherent instruction * explores issues involved in assessment of learning and goals | * demonstrates growing knowledge of content * demonstrates growing knowledge of partner * selects potentially rewarding instructional goals * demonstrates growing knowledge of resources * designs potentially rewarding instruction * identifies issues involved in assessment of learning and goals | * demonstrates beginning knowledge of content * demonstrates beginning knowledge of partner * begins to select rewarding instructional goals * demonstrates beginning knowledge of resources * begins to design potentially rewarding instruction * identifies need for assessment of learning and goals | Insufficient evidence. |
| **REPRESENTATION OF WRITING, TEACHING & RESEARCH** | * communicates clearly and accurately * uses productive question and discussion techniques consistently * engages partner in productive learning * provides rich, generative feedback to partner * demonstrates great flexibility and responsiveness * full/thorough and effective research techniques * distinct and rich description of TR | * communicates clearly and accurately most often * uses question and discussion techniques which are often effective * engages partner in productive learning * provides productive feedback to partner * demonstrates flexibility and responsiveness * considerable and sound research techniques * sturdy description of TR | * indicates increasing ability to communicate with partner * shows moderate success with question and discussion techniques * engages partner in productive learning in definite, occasional moments * indicates increasing ability to provide productive feedback to partner * indicates some flexibility and responsiveness * aware of research strategies * moderately informed description of TR | * struggles to communicate with partner * struggles with question and discussion techniques * attempts to engage partner in productive learning * attempts to provide productive feedback to partner * works toward flexibility and responsiveness * establishing research practices * minimal description of TR | Insufficient evidence. |
| **Rhetorical control** | * shows significant revisions throughout CS process * shows great flexibility in and control of CS genre: rich central area of focus; analytic framework for text; deep discussion; abundant, carefully selected details; appendix * engages readers in questioning and extending their practice * shows adept control of syntactic variety and complexity, grammar, and mechanics. | * shows significant revisions throughout CS process * shows flexibility and success in CS genre: ripe central area of focus; analytic framework for text; developed discussion; abundant, carefully selected details; appendix * shows readers means of questioning and extending their practice * shows solid control of syntactic variety and complexity, grammar, and mechanics. | * shows significant revisions throughout CS process * shows increasing control of CS genre: central area of focus; analytic framework for text; abundant, carefully selected details; appendix * acknowledges readers who can come to question their practices through text * shows modest control of syntactic variety and complexity, grammar, and mechanics. | * shows evidence of revisions throughout CS process * shows emergent facility with CS genre: central area of focus; analytic framework for text; moderate use of selected details; appendix * acknowledges context of diverse readers and practices * attempts control of syntactic variety and complexity, grammar, and mechanics. | Insufficient evidence. |

Due date: \_\_\_\_\_\_

Total points: \_\_\_\_\_\_ (of 20)